

Opulent Opposition

Liberal Incumbents Are Main Targets of TV Ads As Political-Action Groups Exploit Court Ruling

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The 30-second television commercial opens with a picture of a large baloney surrounded on a cutting board by other meats. Suddenly a cleaver slices through the baloney and a voice says, "One very big piece of baloney is Birch Bayh telling us he's fighting inflation."

The price tag appears on the sliced baloney, reading \$46 billion and the voice says, "That's how much deficit spending Bayh voted for last year alone." Pause. "So, to stop inflation, you'll have to stop Bayh first." And then the kicker: "Because if Bayh wins, you lose."

Ads of a similar nature are appearing now in five states, aimed at liberal Democrats seeking reelection in 1980—Sens. Bayh of Indiana, Alan Cranston of California, Frank Church of Idaho, George McGovern of South Dakota and John Culver of Iowa.

No one has been chosen yet to run against any of these Democrats. These ads aren't for anybody. They are against the five Democrats. The ads haven't been approved by any candidate, they are being paid for by the National Conservative Political Action Committee, an independent group in Arlington, Va. NCPAC expects to spend \$700,000 in unrelenting attacks on all five Democrats. It has also begun a campaign attacking Sen. Edward Kennedy's presidential candidacy.

Wave of the Future?

The ads represent a new phenomenon in American politics: "the independent expenditure." Some people call it the wave of the future. It will be tested for the first time this election year, especially by so-called political-action committees, or PACs, which collect voluntary donations for political activities.

Federal legislation passed in 1974 limits such committees to contributing \$5,000 to a candidate for federal office in a primary election and another \$5,000 in the general election. But there is a loophole.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1976 that individuals or committees can't be restrained from spending independently all they want in support of or in opposition to any candidate for federal office. Those are legal independent expenditures, not given directly to any candidate, and the sky's the limit. It is the opening through which NCPAC and others to follow are running.

Generally, the campaigns will be in support of conservatives or in opposition to liberals. Labor unions' PACs haven't any plans to mount independent-expenditure campaigns. They concentrate on helping their friends directly.

In Chicago, the grandfather of all the political-action committees, the giant AMPAC run by the American Medical Association, is completing plans to become deeply involved in independent expenditures for the first time. AMPAC is big business in political spending. In 1978, it laid out \$1,879,164 to help its friends and to defeat its enemies in

House and Senate races. AMPAC officials hope to collect \$2 million for the 1980 elections.

AMPAC's problem is that it collects more money from its participating physician members than it can legally deliver directly to candidates. So Peter Lauer, AMPAC's political-action director, says he wouldn't be surprised if his committee hires media experts and produces independent TV commercials supporting some of the AMA's friends in Congress.

"Without even telling the candidate, we could hire a camera crew and tag along with the guy," Mr. Lauer says. "It would be legal as long as we didn't talk to him or to any of his people. What we'll do is get a list of 100 people or so and put out the word that no one—not any of us here at AMPAC, not our lobbyists in Washington, no one—can talk to these candidates or anyone connected with them because we may go independent expenditure with them. In the end, probably we'll go with 25 candidates this way."

This election, Mr. Lauer says, all of AMPAC's independent spending will be positive—for, not against, a candidate. He concedes, though, that his committee might begin experimenting with "negative stuff" during the 1982 congressional elections.

The negative stuff seems to worry people the most. "It tends to be schlock from what I've seen," Mr. Lauer says, "and we aren't yet convinced it does any good." He is afraid the negative material now being aired against the five liberal Democrats may give independent expenditures "a bad name."

Terry Dolan, NCPAC's executive director and the man chiefly responsible for the "negative stuff," isn't at all apologetic. "There is no question our stuff is strident," he says. "We're as popular out there (in those five states) with the general voters as the plague. But our polls show we have made these liberal Democrats vulnerable, and some people didn't think that was possible."

Aiming at Sen. McGovern

The No. 1 target for Mr. Dolan and the other conservative groups is Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota. So many groups are running independent-expenditure campaigns against Mr. McGovern, says the Senator's aide, George Cunningham, that "it's like Emmett Kelly was orchestrating the whole business" for a three-ring circus.

NCPAC has been running commercials attacking Mr. McGovern as a "globetrotter" who "was touring Cuba with Fidel Castro while the energy crisis was brewing." In a newspaper ad, Mr. McGovern is charged with selling out both Taiwan and the United States.

NCPAC likes some of the ads so much it runs them, with minor changes, against a couple of candidates. The "Globetrotter" ad used against Sen. McGovern is also used, with appropriate changes, against Sen. Culver. One 30-second TV spot begins with an announcer saying, "Globetrotter is a great name for a basketball team. But it's a terrible name for a Senator." The ad used against Sen. Culver says he "took four extensive junkets visiting countries all around the world" while the energy crisis was brewing.

Another favorite is a radio commercial called "rating game." In one version of the ad, used against Sen. Cranston, Mrs. Verna Smith of Sacramento is asked how she thinks the National Taxpayers Union rates her Senator on the question of protecting her dollar. "One hundred percent!" she replies. "I'm sorry," the announcer replies, "You lose." The Senator's rating, he says, is a miserable 8%.

Mrs. Smith Loses Again

In another version, used against Sen. Bayh, the same Mrs. Smith is living in Indianapolis. And she is as naive as ever. She loses all three guesses—on how her Indiana Senator stands on protecting her dollar, farm issues and national security. "That's three failing grades," Mrs. Smith says. "I never knew Birch Bayh voted like that." In Sacramento, she says the same thing about Sen. Cranston.

The baloney ad is used against Sen. Cranston and Sen. Bayh. Mr. Cranston, like Sen. Bayh, voted for \$46 billion in deficit spending, the ad says. The five Democratic Senators say the charges made against them in the various independent ads are baloney.

In Idaho, so many committees are running anti-Frank Church advertising that it's hard to sort them out.

NCPAC was first with a commercial showing a Republican state legislator standing in front of an empty missile silo to dramatize the allegation that "Senator Church has almost always opposed a strong national defense."

But the missing missile was an early Titan, withdrawn from service when the more sophisticated Minuteman missiles were deployed. "He said we filmed the commercial in front of the wrong missile," Mr. Dolan says. "We don't think that's important. What we want to do is talk about his record, and we're right about that."

NCPAC Connection?

NCPAC is running other ads against Sen. Church, and Mr. Dolan says they are working. Mr. Church's press secretary, Cleve Corlett, says there is a connection between NCPAC and the man who will oppose the Senator, conservative Republican Rep. Steve Symms. "Symms is on the board of a lot of these committees operated by Richard Viguerie, of which NCPAC is just one," Mr. Corlett says.

Mr. Viguerie, a direct-mail specialist, handles the fund raising for Mr. Dolan's committee and for several others interested in "New Right" political causes. Mr. Symms is a member of the board of several "New Right" groups associated with Mr. Viguerie, but not NCPAC itself.

Buddy Bishop, a veteran Republican political consultant with offices in Washington, D.C., has been at work in Idaho too, developing anti-Church commercials for the Idaho Committee for a Positive Change. Mr. Bishop's commercials also have been criticized, especially one that attacked Sen. Church's record on the Vietnam war. One newspaperman, David Morrissey of the Twin Falls Times-News, said the wording was similar to a John Birch Society attack on Mr. Church published in 1974. Mr. Bishop

doesn't deny some of the people on his committee may be Birchers. "In Idaho," he says, "there's no reason to expect anything else."

Other groups working independently to defeat Sen. Church in Idaho are Stop the Baby Killers, the National Right to Life Committee, and the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms.

Kennedy Becomes Target

Neither NCPAC nor AMPAC usually get involved in presidential politics, but the decision by Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts to seek the Democratic nomination for President was too much for NCPAC to resist. It ran \$23,000 of advertising in the Washington Post and the Boston Globe attacking the Senator's record and produced a radio commercial. Soon it will dispatch a "truth squad" to follow Mr. Kennedy. All of the money being spent will be reported as independent expenditures.

AMPAC officials say they won't become involved. But they add that the presidential run by Mr. Kennedy, the leading backer of national health insurance, might encourage their member physicians to open their wallets at all political levels.

Critics of political-action committees contend such groups already have too much influence on political campaigns and politicians. Of the 435 members of the House of Representatives, a study by Common Cause discloses, 320 have received AMA money. Common Cause, the self-styled citizens group, suggests a cause-and-effect relationship in the Nov. 15 vote on an AMA-supported amendment to gut the administration's hospital cost-containment legislation. Of the 234 House members who voted with

the AMA, 282 had taken AMA money. "AMA," says Fred Wertheimer, executive vice president of Common Cause, "has put together the biggest and the most successful coalition in Congress."

But in states where conservative groups are mounting independent campaigns attacking liberal Democrats, the problem is getting tough candidates to run against the Democrats.

McGovern Opponents

So far, the only candidate opposing Sen. McGovern is 29-year-old Republican Dale Bell, a former NCPAC employee, who has been running his own anti-McGovern commercials. One of them, introduced on Memorial Day, pictured Mr. Bell standing in a cemetery and attacking Mr. McGovern for wanting to send American boys to Cambodia. (Mr. McGovern says he was talking about sending American troops in conjunction with troops from other countries, to make sure the starving Cambodians got food.)

It didn't help conservatives in South Dakota when two likely Republican opponents for Mr. McGovern, Attorney General Mark Meierhenry and State Treasurer David Volk, were discovered playing blackjack for money in a saloon in Winner, a small town in south-central South Dakota famous for its wide-open gambling during pheasant season.

When two investigative reporters walked up to the two state officials, the attorney general asked them if their visit was official or unofficial. When they said it was official and that they were preparing a news story, he laid down his hand. He had 20, the dealer 19. Then he closed up the bar.

The conventional wisdom in South Dakota is that neither he nor his friend, the treasurer, can beat Mr. McGovern.